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DCFS Runaway Outreach Unit

The Runaway Outreach Unit is a countywide specialized program designed to locate, stabilize and reduce the recidivism of the AWOL population within the Department. It is designed to work with the hard to place runaway and disenfranchised youth that have felt the need to live their lives apart from the system and away from the rules and requirements of foster care. The program is designed to provide secondary case carrying assistance to primary case carrying CSW's with locating, placing and stabilizing AWOL youth. The program is also specialized in that each of the CSW's in the program are strongly focused on this population with many spending the majority of their social welfare careers working with high risk and runaway youth. These social welfare professionals truly understand the psychological dynamics of this population and also recognize the needs and desires of the typical chronic runaway. The ROU program works with youth 17 and under as long as they are still dependents of the Juvenile Dependency system. ROU CSWs will assist in locating and developing client-centered case plans and services that are central to stabilizing this population. The program works very closely with a great deal of community based partnerships that provide case management services, mental health services, gang intervention, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and educational/vocational services to this high-risk population. The ROU program can also provide technical assistance and/or training to CSW's, Community Based Partners and out of home care providers in areas related to the runaway population.

The Runaway Outreach Unit was established in 1984 as a pilot project formally known as the Runaway Adolescent Program (RAP). This program focused on the pre-delinquent and repeated runaway behaviors of the Department's AWOL youth population. It identified those who were at high risk of exploitation and violence and provided a safety net for these youth while endeavoring to keep them off the streets. The program was designed to provide specialized social welfare services to the runaway and homeless teenage populations known to frequent and squat within the Hollywood area (i.e., living in abandoned buildings). At that time, the RAP program was staffed by primary case-carrying CSW's that focused on a collaborative effort with the LAPD Hollywood Division to "rid" the streets in Hollywood of these runaway youth.

Supporting the RAP unit was the Street Outreach Services (SOS) program. This program focused on searching for and locating runaway and AWOL youth. Its goal in working with the homeless youth population was to reduce the rate of recidivism and repeat AWOL behaviors.

In December of 2005, the Missing Children's Task Force found that there were a high number of AWOL children within the Department and many whom were missing for over 200 days. The computerized software system called ARKS (Abducted and Runaway Kids System) was not accurately reflecting the number of children who were actually missing. As children were found and placed, their names and outstanding warrants were not being removed timely, falsely creating an exaggeratingly high number of missing children.

The L.A. County Board of Supervisors mandated that our Department clean up the ARK's data base and do a better job of monitoring our runaway and missing youth populations. The Board also asked for feedback, tracking and monthly reports on this progress.

In March of 2006, Dr. David Sanders, then Director of the DCFS, directed that each runaway case would be assigned a P3 (Permanency Partners Program) worker to assist on the case. The P3 worker would mine the case, search for, and provide assistance to the primary case-carrying workers for these runaway youth.

For approximately the last 4 years, our Department has submitted a report to the Board of Supervisors 5th District summarizing the Department's work and efforts in locating and stabilizing the runaway youth population it services.

Since April of 2007, the runaway program was restructured and it now functions as a secondary case-carrying unit. The purpose of this shift was to provide a more intensive level of care to all runaway youth serviced by the Department. The program continues to provide runaway related services but immediate attention is being directed towards the Department's court dependent population. Currently the program services approximately 400 dependent youth who were either away from care for long periods of time or are chronic repeat runaways. The program has been effective in replacing and stabilizing approximately 1200 of these youth with another 350 youth successfully emancipating through the system.

Whereas the P3 workers were assigned to each regional office throughout the Department, the ROU CSWs are centralized in one location (MetroPlex building). This provides much better organization and coordination of services for a county-wide program. Now, the P3 workers are primarily involved with those cases which require additional help in establishing permanency or permanent connections in a youth's life.

The CSWs in the ROU are dedicated to the mission of the ROU. They have desire, know how and passion to devote their time to work exclusively with the runaway youth (a difficult high-risk population). They have the skill set necessary to be effective in working with the population, and can devote their energies solely to these youth since they are not otherwise encumbered with the case-management obligations of handling cases as a primary CSW. They are also familiar with the community resources that serve runaway youth (e.g., shelters and drop-in services) and are invested in developing new community resources during the course of their work.

The Runaway Outreach Unit continues to evolve and mold itself to the needs of the transient runaway population and has recently begun a stronger focus of services towards effectively bringing all dependent AWOL youth back into care through client-driven case plans. To aid in the process, the ROU is calling for and utilizing tools such as TDM's (Team Decision-Making meetings), FGDM's (Family Group Decision-Making meetings), and Emancipation conferences. The Runaway Outreach Unit strongly feels

that reducing recidivism and stabilizing this population is paramount to a successful transition into adulthood.

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RUNAWAY OUTREACH UNIT

Overview

The Runaway Outreach Unit (ROU) is a countywide specialized program designed to locate, stabilize and reduce the recidivism of the Runaway/Pre-delinquent/Crossover youth population within the Department of Children & Family Services. It is designed to work with the hard to place runaway and disenfranchised youth that have felt the need to live their lives apart from the system and away from the rules and requirements of foster care. The program is set up to provide enhanced, specialized, and secondary case carrying assistance to primary case carrying CSWs. This involves the ROU CSWs work in locating, placing, establishing rapport and stabilizing runaway youth. The program is also specialized in that each of the CSW's in the program are strongly focused on this population with many spending the majority of their social welfare careers working with high risk, pre-delinquent and runaway youth. These social welfare professionals truly understand the psychological dynamics of this population and also recognize the needs and desires of the typical chronic runaway.

The ROU program works with youth age 17 and under as long as they are still dependents of the Juvenile Dependency system. ROU CSW's assist in locating, placing and developing client-centered case plans and services that are central to stabilizing this population. The program works very closely with a great deal of community based partnerships that provide case management services, mental health services, gang intervention, domestic trafficking intervention, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and educational/vocational services to this high-risk population. The ROU program also provides technical assistance and trainings to CSW's, Law Enforcement, Community Based Partners and out of home care providers in areas related to the runaway pre-delinquent/crossover youth populations.

Uniqueness of Program

What makes the ROU unique from the generic regional social welfare professional and other specialized youth permanency programs is the ability to build unmatched rapport with disenfranchised youth and the unit's ability to think "outside the box" in the social service delivery process. This individualized strength based approach is much more attractive and welcoming for youth in crisis and creates a much more user friendly environment for a youth to return. The cutting edge nature of services provided by the unit creates a comfort zone for the youth involved in the program so that they feel at ease with their case planning process and have personal investment in their lives. The trainings that each of the ROU CSWs have been through have been thorough and laser focused on the issues that they are faced with on a daily basis while working with at risk youth. The ROU CSWs have the passion and skill set necessary to be effective in working with this population, and can devote their energies solely to these youths since they are not otherwise encumbered with the case-management obligations of a primary CSW. The ROU regularly teams and partners with multiple community based agencies and youth advocates that now provide direct

linkage to support services affecting the at risk pre-delinquent runaway and high risk populations. The ROU Management Team is also very supportive of this process and believes there is room in assessing various strategies on a case by case basis that are successful in working with these youths.

Programmatic Duties and Functions

- Daily tracking and monitoring of all DCFS Runaways/Abductions on the Abducted Runaway Kids System (ARKS).
- Monitoring I-Track (Special Incident Report System) from Out of Home Care Management providers for early runaway episodes.
- Providing specialized Training and Education for both internal and external partners on working with Runaway/Pre-delinquent Youth.
- Providing specialized enhanced secondary case carrying assistance to all departmental Runaways and Primary CSWs.
- Providing liaison services between DCFS and Law Enforcement to assure that all runaways are properly accounted for and serviced accordingly.
- Providing monthly/quarterly statistical data to the Board of Supervisors 5th District on the Department's efforts to locate, place and stabilize the runaway population.

ROU CSW's Responsibilities upon Receiving a Case

- Introduction E-mail to primary CSW, SCSW, P3 Worker (if applicable) with follow up phone call to coordinate services and request all possible leads.
- Immediate contact with most recent placement setting for possible leads and reasons behind the runaway episode.
- Immediate contact with assigned LAPD/Sheriff Detective/Probation Officer on the case to coordinate services and obtain missing persons report number.
- Contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to assure that there is an active missing person's referral and an assigned NCMEC social worker on the case.

- Contact the Los Angeles County Coroners Office to assure that there is an up to date photo of all youth missing from care and assuring that there has been no child fatality that matches the description of the youth already in there care.
- Create a missing persons bulletin and photo to be distributed by the NCMEC and placed in public locations.
- Thoroughly mine the case for any and all possible leads on the whereabouts of the runaway youth.
- Conduct on-line search on social networking sites such as; Facebook, My Space, Google Search, US search for any and all possible leads to the youths whereabouts.
- Contact all community based shelter care providers for possible leads or client contact.
- Contact parents, siblings and relatives to see if youth are currently residing with or being harbored by relatives.
- Follow up on all leads by visiting all possible locations of the youth.
- Document all efforts and contacts and assure that Primary CSW's, SCSW's and treatment teams are up to date with all efforts.

ROU CSW's Responsibilities upon Locating Runaway Youth

- Begin building rapport while transitioning youth back into DCFS care, which includes extensive engagement approaches and activities.
- Build and strengthen family and other support systems to be available to the youths.
- Develop a trusting mentoring relationship with the youth.
- Assist regional CSWs in locating appropriate placement settings and help to stabilize youths in these placements.
- Initiate Team Decision Making Meetings, Family Group Decision Making Meetings, RMP's and Transition Conferences.

- Identifying and linking youth with appropriate community resources and services, including DMH , medical hub, drug and alcohol, gang intervention, domestic trafficking counseling and shelter care as needed.
- Assist CSW's and youth with creating client centered individualized case plans that incorporate ideas and suggestions from the youth and the treatment team.
- Educate the youths about personal safety issues, appropriate life choices, and behavioral consequences.
- Provide weekly supportive face to face placement stabilization services designed to reduce runaway recidivism, ease youths transition back into DCFS care and assist caregivers with stabilization concerns.
- Assist primary CSW's and youth with outstanding Delinquency Court Warrants and issues related to their legal status.
- Explore permanency options with youth, P3 (if applicable) and regional offices to consider whether youth can safely return to the home of parent, legal guardian or relative.
- Assure that the DCFS 729A (Warrant Recall) is submitted timely to remove youth from the Abducted Runaway Kids System (ARKS) so that they are not arrested while in the community.
- Contact Law Enforcement and NCMEC to assure that they are aware that youth have been returned to care, warrants are recalled and removed for the WIC 300 dependency system and missing persons reports are lifted and cleared.
- Monitor minors in placement for a stabilization period of 3 months to ensure they have stabilized and are able to transition back into the community via school, mental and physical health services, transitional and independent living resource training and/or eventual departmental emancipation.
- Work with youth and their Primary CSW's to foster trust and a smooth working relationship.

Goals and Outcomes

Goals for youth assigned to the ROU are safety, stability and a reconnection to foster care and/or permanency and are reflected in both progress and outcome goals. These goals are:

- Youth will begin to have their safety needs met and transitioned back into care.
- Youth will decrease their runaway episodes and negative pre-delinquent behavior.
- Youth will regain trust and build rapport with the Department & their Primary CSWs.
- Youth will gain mentors and youth advocates.
- Youth will increase the number of appropriate support systems.
- Youth will begin to stabilize in care (reducing placement episodes).
- Youth will have investment and “say so” in their case planning process.
- Youth will be assessed and receive mental and physical health services.
- Youth will be assessed for and receive educational and transitional resource services.
- Youth will be assessed for and receive drug, gang and domestic trafficking intervention.
- Youth will be assessed for and receive the best level of care (most appropriate and least restrictive).
- Youth will ultimately be better prepared for eventual transition to independence.
- Youth will have reduced lengths of stay in out of home care.
- Youth will have an increased chance for permanency.

Closing Summary

Currently the program services approximately 425 dependent youth who were either away from care for long periods of time or are chronic repeat runaways. There are currently 299 youth who appear on the most recent Abducted Runaway Kids System (ARKS) report, with 126 youth receiving supportive stabilization services. Since the inception of the ROU program, over 1200 of these youth have been returned to the care of DCFS with another 350 youth successfully emancipating through the Juvenile Dependency system. Although caseloads remain high and challenges stiff, the ROU feels that the services offered are one of a kind, unique, and desperately needed. The overall departmental runaway recidivism rate is at an all time low and fewer youth are at risk due to being away from care. As the program continues to improve its overall delivery process and meet the ever growing challenges of the at risk population it is anticipated that the departments runaway rate will continue to decrease, that child safety will improve, and that the amount of time the these youths spend in out of home care will also decrease.

EB/GK/HM

Department of Children and Family Services
RUNAWAY OUTREACH UNIT
QUARTERLY RUNAWAY YOUTH REPORT
MARCH, 2012

This is the eleventh quarterly runaway youth report. It covers the period of December, 2011 to, February 2012 regarding the ongoing efforts of the Runaway Outreach Unit (ROU) to address the needs of youth who are "at risk" and have run away from the care of DCFS.

As of December 15, 2011 there were 285 runaway youth under the age of 18 reported on the ARKS system. As of January 15, 2012 there were 273 runaway youth under the age of 18 reported on the ARKS system. As of February 15, 2012 there were 266 youth under the age of 18 reported on the ARKS system. Of the youth from this quarterly period:

- 610 youth are or were receiving services from ROU
- 0 youth are or were awaiting ROU assignment
- 103 youth were child abduction cases
- 111 youth were placed / stabilized and / or closed

December 15, 2011, January 15, 2012, and February 15, 2012 ARKS Reports

The December 15, 2011 ARKS report reflects a decrease of four (4) in the number of runaway children under the age of 18, when compared to the previous month. The January 15, 2012 ARKS report reflects a decrease of twelve (12) from the previous month. The February 15, 2012 ARKS report reflects a decrease of seven (7) from the previous month. (Table 1)

Table 1: Comparison of Runaway Youth Totals for the Previous Months

# of AWOL youth on 11-15-11	# of AWOL youth on 12-15-11	Change in Number	Percentage
289	285	- 4	- 2%

# of AWOL youth on 12-15-11	# of AWOL youth on 01-15-12	Change in Number	Percentage
285	273	-12	- 5%

# of AWOL youth on 01-15-12	# of AWOL youth on 02-15-11	Change in Number	Percentage
273	266	- 7	- 3%

Manual Review of ROU Activities

The ROU administrative team reviewed all cases of youth being assisted by the Program. The results of that review are illustrated below. Table 2 identifies the number of youth that were located in either approved or unapproved locations since the program inception. Table 2A identifies the number of youth that were recently located, youth located in unapproved locations and youth where contact was made but the location was not discovered or verified. Tables 3 and 3A illustrate the previous and ongoing efforts to engage the youth and other family members.

Table 2: Results of Efforts to Locate Youth – Since P3/ROU Program Inception
* P3 involvement with runaway activities ended March, 2008

Youth located & officially placed	Youth located & verified in unapproved locations	Youth where contact was made but location not discovered or verified
1921	1066	618

Table 2A: Results of Efforts to Locate Youth – Current Reporting Period

DECEMBER, 2011

Youth located and officially placed by ROU or primary CSW	Youth located and verified in unapproved locations	Youth where contact was made but location was not discovered or verified
33	10	33

JANUARY, 2012

Youth located and officially placed by ROU or primary CSW	Youth located and verified in unapproved locations	Youth where contact was made but location was not discovered or verified
23	8	7

FEBRUARY, 2011

Youth located and officially placed by ROU or primary CSW	Youth located and verified in unapproved locations	Youth where contact was made but location was not discovered or verified
21	14	22

Table 3: Active Efforts to Engage Youth and Family Members – Since P3/ROU Program Inception

** P3 involvement with runaway activities ended March, 2008*

ROU Completed Mining the Case Record	ROU Consulted with case carrying CSW/SCSW
1908	1854

Table 3A: Active Efforts to Engage Youth and Family Members – Current Reporting Period

DECEMBER, 2011

ROU Utilized US Search (specialized search engine)	ROU Attempted/ Completed telephone contact with Youth/Family	ROU Attempted/ Completed in person contact with Youth/Family
0	96	49

JANUARY, 2012

ROU Utilized US Search (specialized search engine)	ROU Attempted/ Completed telephone contact with Youth/Family	ROU Attempted/ Completed in person contact with Youth/Family
0	105	51

FEBRUARY, 2012

ROU Utilized US Search (specialized search engine)	ROU Attempted/ Completed telephone contact with Youth/Family	ROU Attempted/ Completed in person contact with Youth/Family
0	100	74

Conclusion

During the past quarterly reporting period, the Department has again seen a significant reduction in the number of runaway episodes from previous months. Although caseloads remain high and the ROU CSW's are continually juggling between locating runaway youth and stabilizing youth who have returned to care, the program continues to play a strategic role in the department. Regional CSW's now rely heavily on the CSW's in the ROU unit with providing any and all stabilization services to these at risk youth. While focused case planning for hard

to place youth and working with first time runners remains a high priority, reducing the department's recidivism rate also remains just as important.

The ROU has continued to expand its visibility both within the department as well as in the community and the coordinated efforts continues to grow. The multiple partnerships and cooperative efforts that have been forged by the unit have greatly enhanced the efficacy and the expedience of the ROU and its recovery efforts. Runaway youth are now provided a more focused case planning process that has enhanced their chances for stabilization and increased their likelihood of remaining in placement for longer periods of time.

Although challenges remain high and the issue surrounding the high risk youth runaway population continue to be complex, the ROU continues to enhance it's effectiveness and remain steadfast in reducing runaway behavior and increasing placement stability for the departments runaway population.